US Highway 26 Draft Wildlife Mitigation Strategy & Public Feedback

Public Input Meeting

Tuesday April 27, 2021 at 6pm

Online Meeting Platform

- Use the **Chat Box** to ask questions or give feedback
  - Moderator will address these after the initial presentation
- You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback online following this meeting
  - Online feedback form on project webpage (link will be sent out to meeting participants)

US 26 December Public Meeting

- Shared progress on partnership to develop a mitigation strategy for US 26
  - Review of different types of mitigation and their applications
  - Mitigation concepts under discussion for US 26
- Public feedback, Q&A
  - Public input integrated into Draft Mitigation Strategy
  - Responses to comments in Appendix B of the Draft Mitigation Strategy

    https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Regional-Offices/Lander-Region-old/Wildlife-and-Roadways

Today's Presentation & Discussion

Our goals:

- Present draft mitigation strategy
  - Priority segments for targeted investments where more intensive mitigation will have the greatest benefit and cost-effectiveness
  - Where to invest in higher-cost mitigation
  - Lower-cost mitigation options in other segments
- Get public input on the draft strategy

Tonight's Speakers

Randy Merritt, District Construction Engineer, Basin

Daryl Lutz, Wildlife Management Coordinator, Lander Region

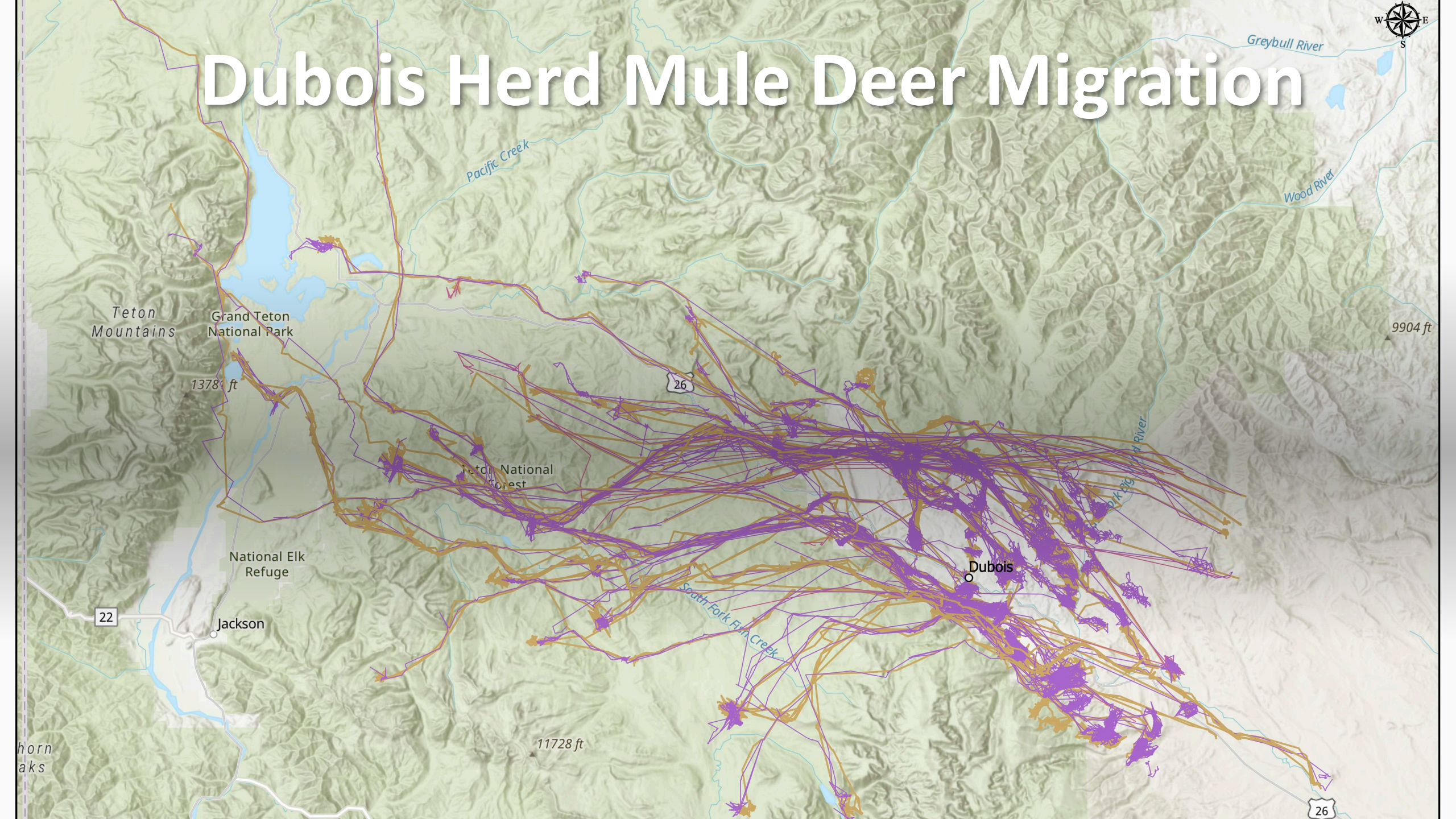
Julia Kintsch, Principal & Senior Ecologist

Interagency Collaboration

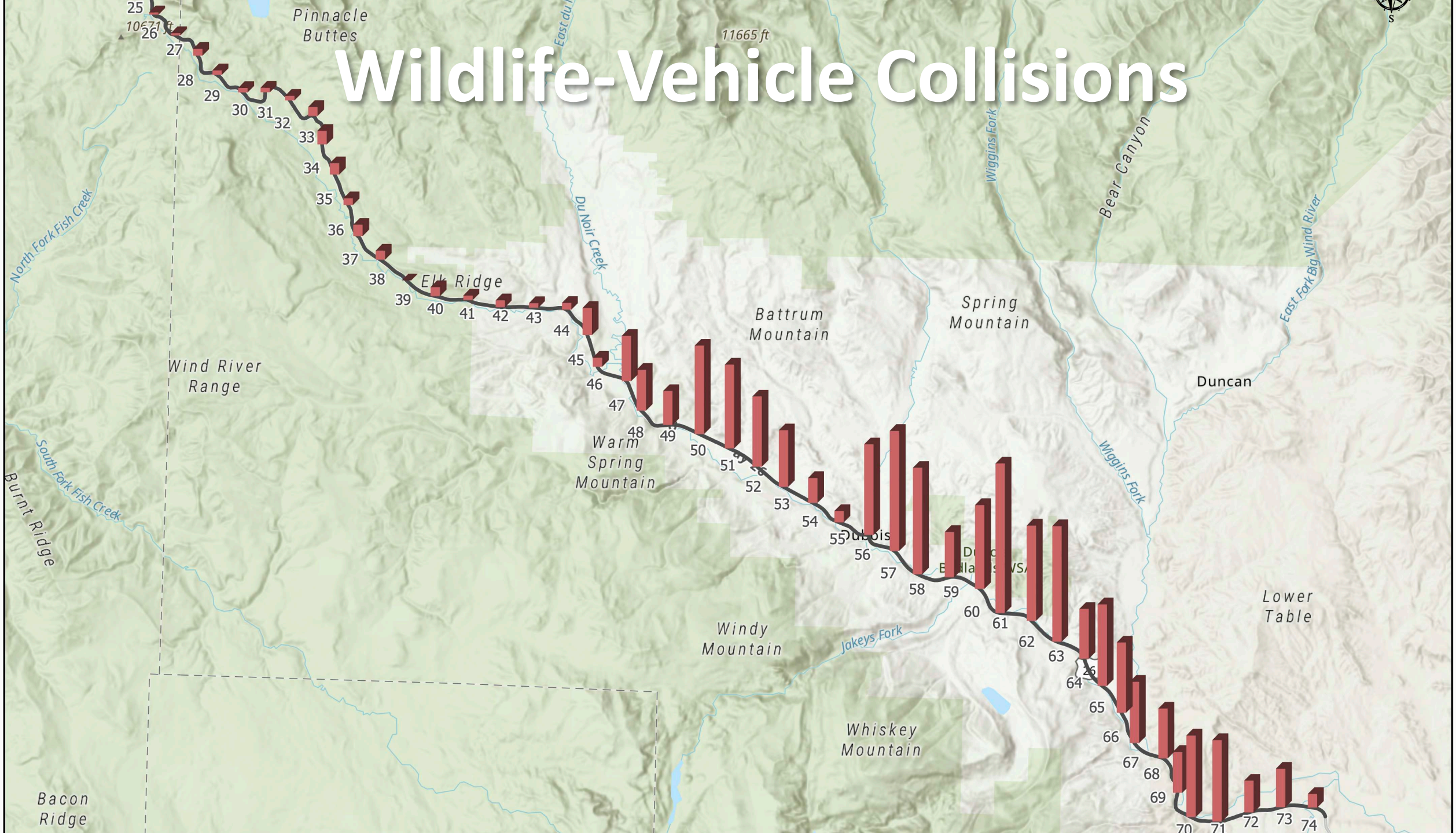
US Highway 26

- Identified as a statewide priority
- Public demand to address safety issues
- WGFD and WYDOT partnership to develop a collaborative plan

Dubois Herd Mule Deer Migration

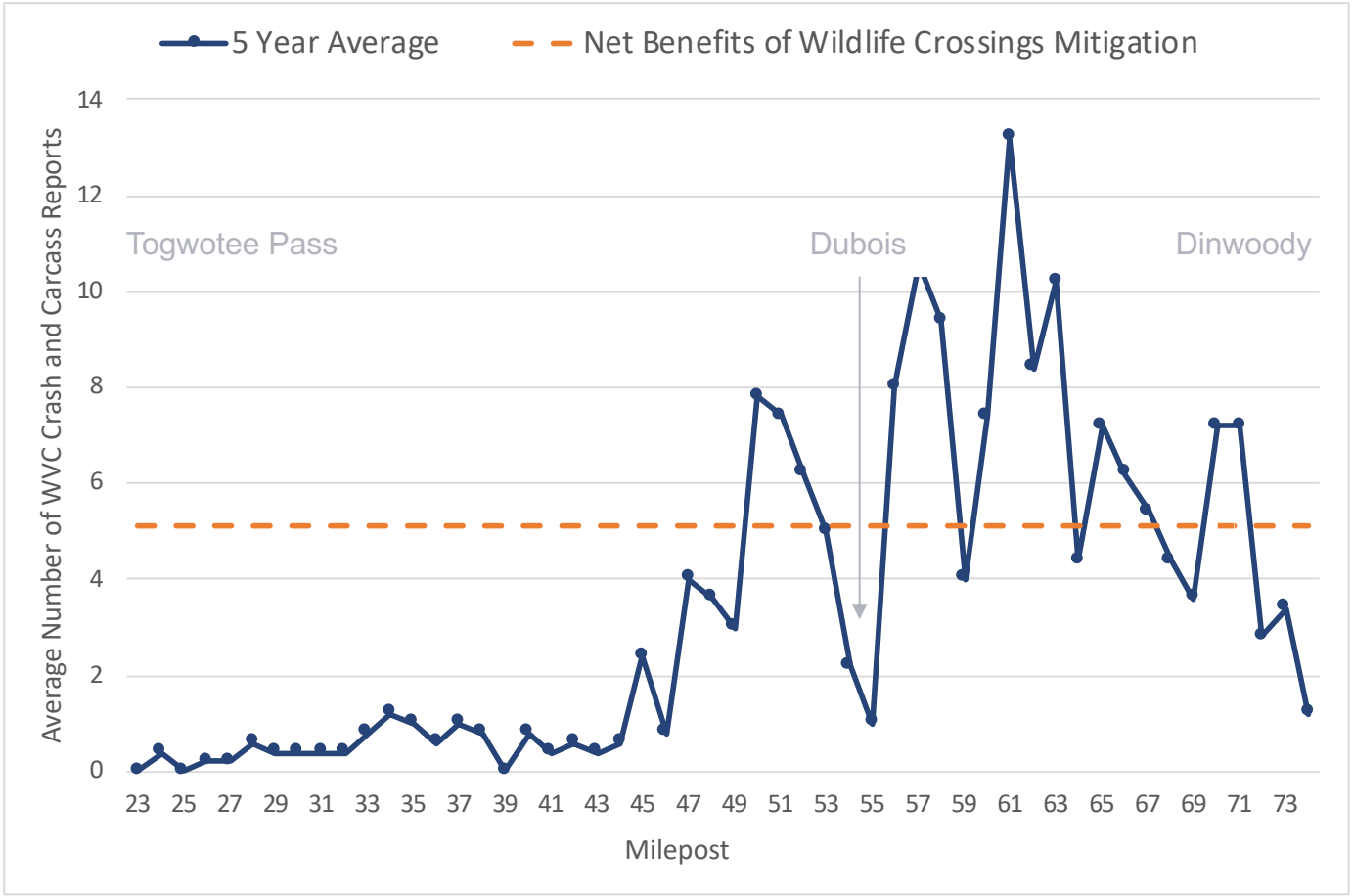


Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions



US 26: Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions (WVC)

- From 2015-2019
  - 187 WVC crashes
  - 714 WVC carcasses
- WVCs = 74% of all reported crashes
- Net benefits of mitigating WVC realized when ≥5.1 WVCs per mile per year

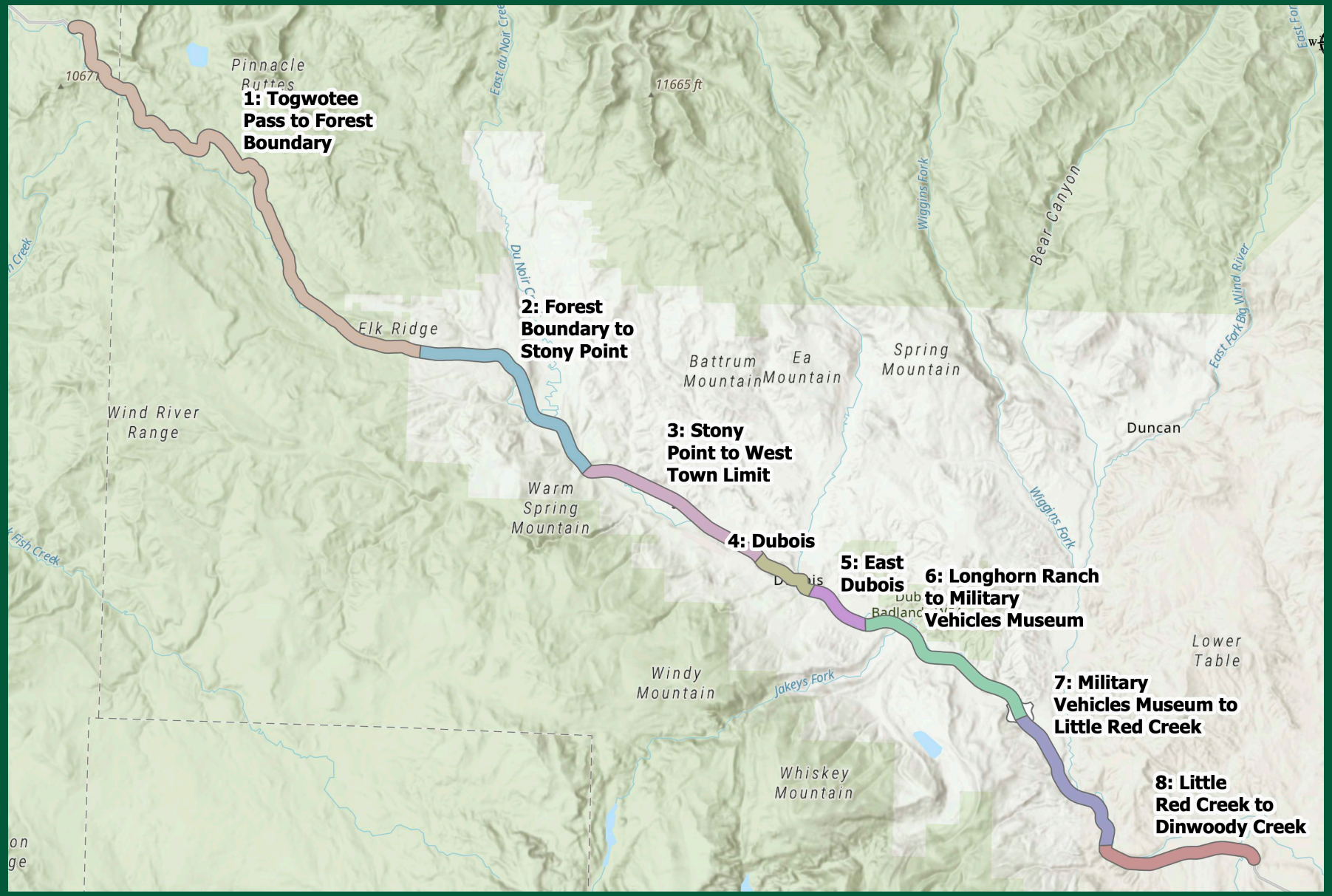


Evaluating and Prioritizing Segments for Mitigation

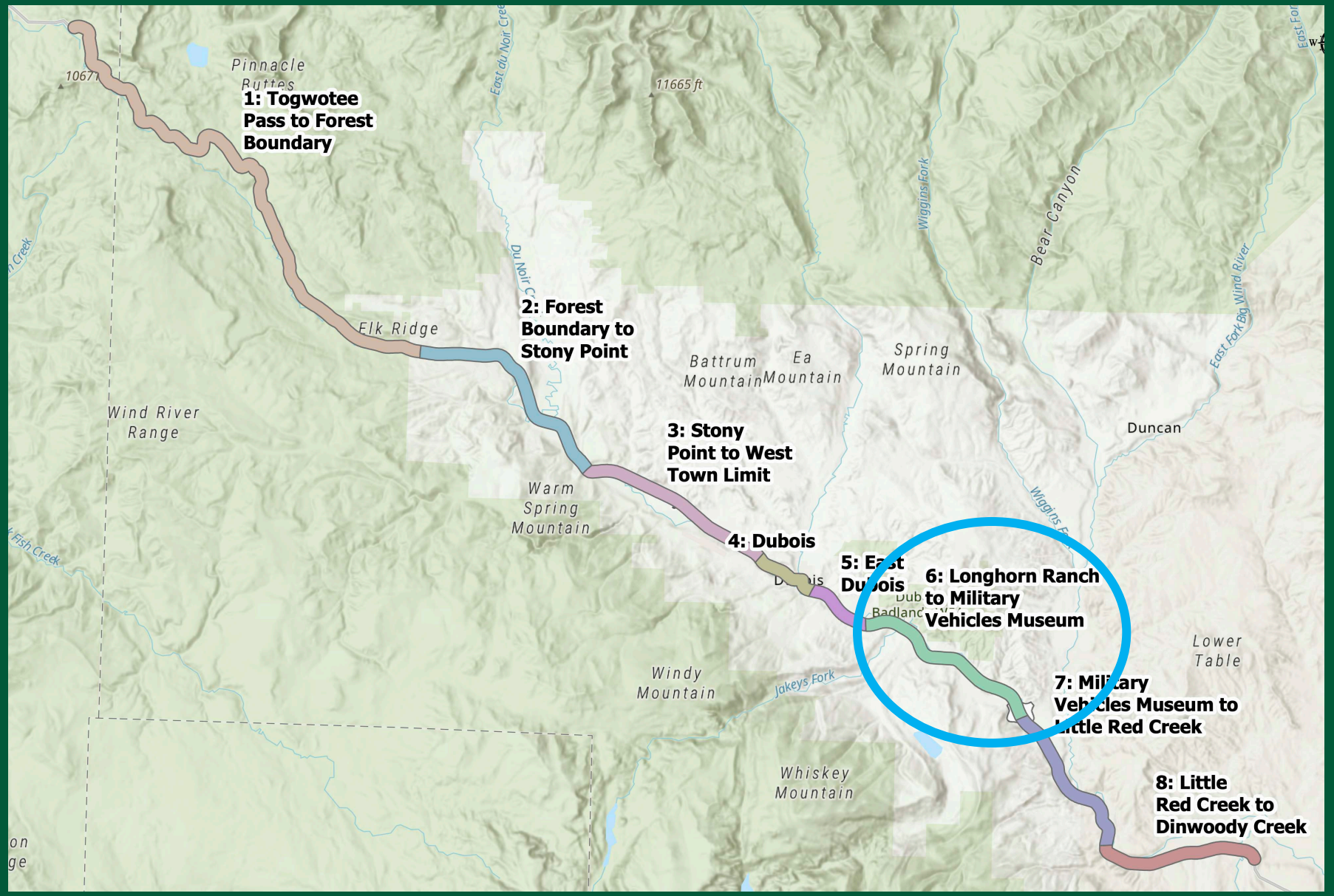
1. Biological Assessment
   - Wildlife movement and habitat data
   - WVC datasets
   - Other roadway, land use and land ownership data
2. Field Review
   - Potential functionality of existing bridges and culverts for wildlife
   - Roadway context
     - Features that promote or inhibit wildlife movement
     - Features that increase WVC potential
   - Potential mitigation strategies
     - Opportunities and challenges

Evaluating and Prioritizing Segments for Mitigation

3. Recommendations Development
   - Greatest wildlife movement needs
   - Highest WVC rates
   - Cost-effectiveness
   - Implementation feasibility
   - Apply latest research and best practices
4. Prioritize Mitigation Actions
   - Based on greatest need/impact; however, other factors influencing feasibility may shift how priorities get implemented.

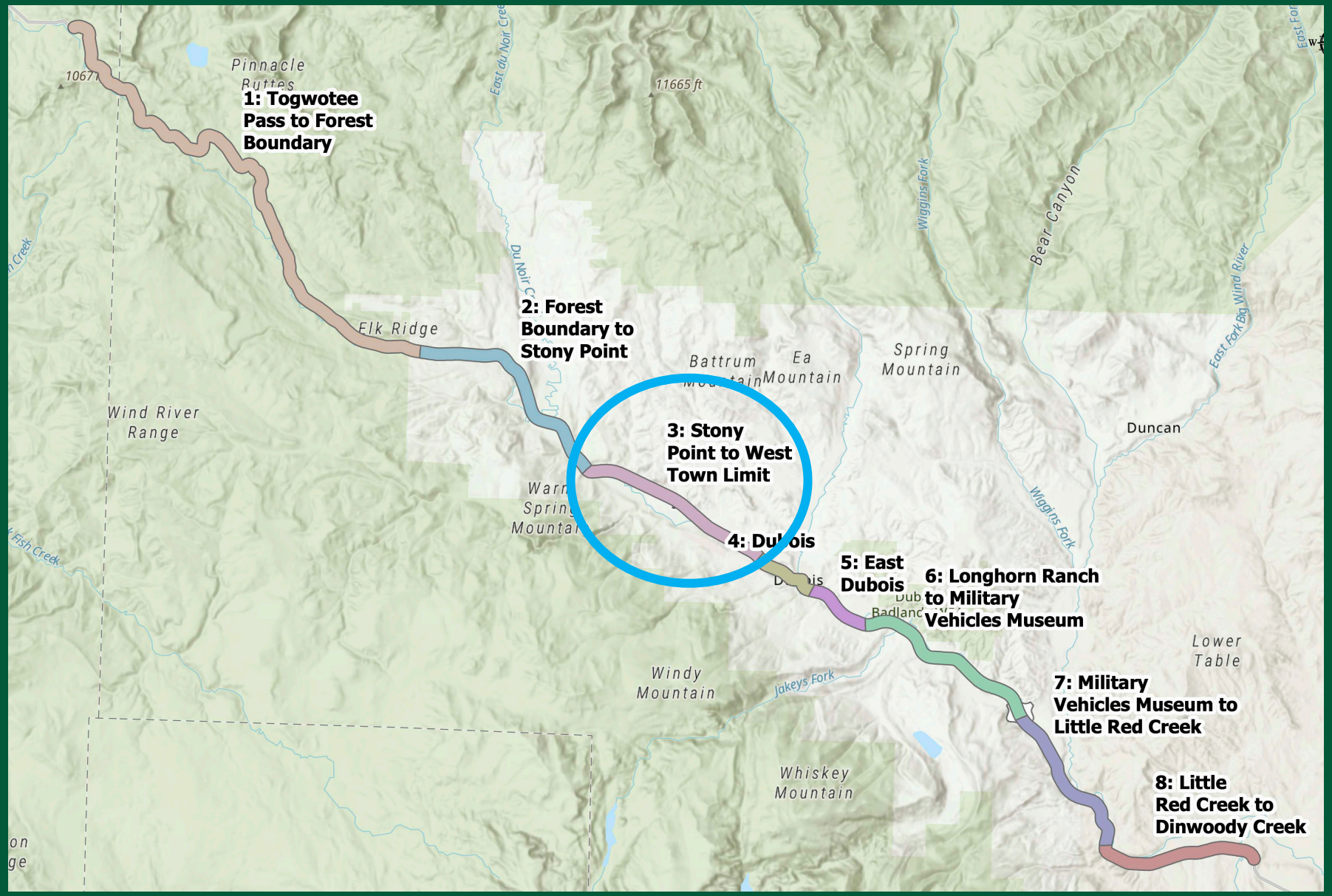


Divided Study Area into 8 Segments



Priority Segment

- Segment 6: Longhorn Ranch to Military Vehicle Museum



Priority Segment

- Segment 3: Stony Point to West Town Limits

High Priority Segment 6: Longhorn Ranch to Military Vehicles Museum

MP 58 – 64.5

- Safety Issue:
  - Very high WVCs: 8.7 per mile per year
  - Highest peak in WVC around MP 61
- Wildlife Concerns
  - Heart of winter range for the Dubois herd
  - Daily movements across US 26 in fall and early winter

Why is this a High Priority?

- Mitigation Investments in this segment can have a major impact on reducing WVC
  - Very high rate of WVC (8.7 per mile per year)
- Multiple opportunities to integrate existing infrastructure into the mitigation system
  - Reduce overall cost

High Priority Segment 6: Mitigation Recommendations

Improve Existing Infrastructure for Wildlife Passage

- Create wildlife pathways under existing bridges
- Optimize existing stock passes to permit wildlife passage
- Connect wildlife fencing between existing bridges and new crossing structures

High Priority
Segment 6: Mitigation Recommendations

Construct New Wildlife Crossing Structures

- 4 new wildlife crossings
- Install wildlife fencing to connect existing bridges, small culverts, and new crossings

- Proposed Crossing Structures:
  - MP 58.6 – underpass
  - MP 59.5 – overpass
  - MP 61.5 – underpass
  - MP 62.9 - underpass

Segment 6: Longhorn Ranch to Military Vehicles Museum Mitigation Concept

Nyssa Whitford
Wildlife GIS Analyst
Lander Regional Office
4.26.21

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Proposed Structures
Existing Structures
Proposed 8' Wildlife Fence
Right of Way Fence

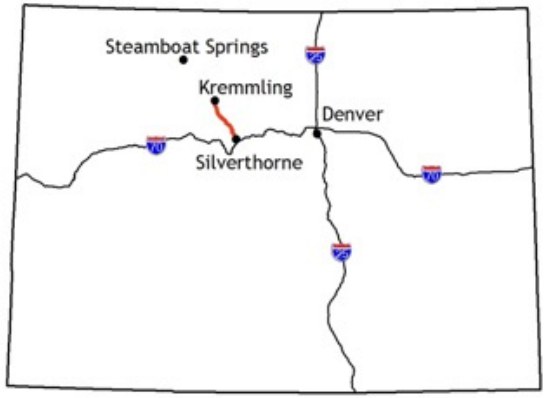
Challenges

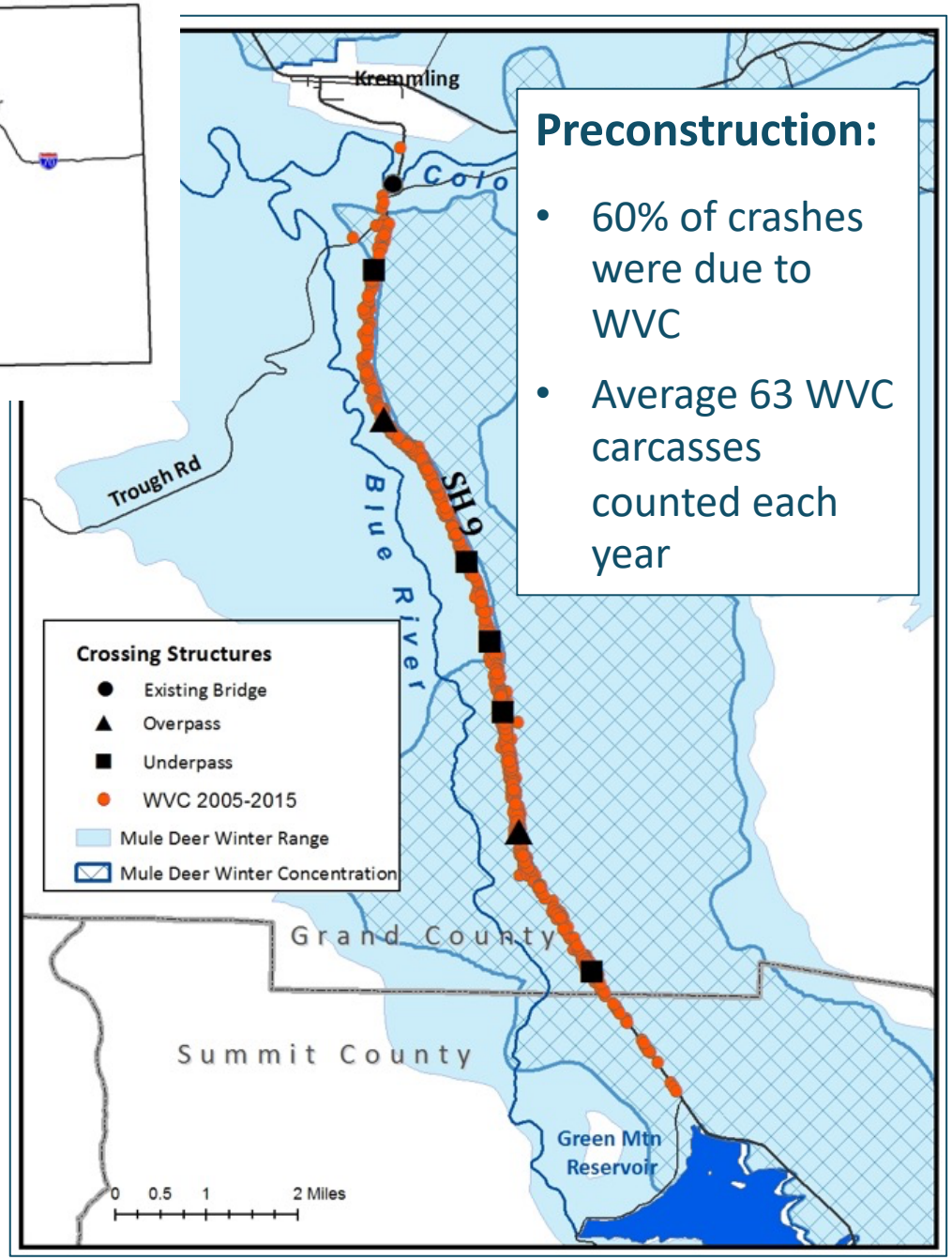
- Cost
  - May require constructing in phases
- Multiple driveways requiring access through fencing
  - Requires installing wildlife guards
- Lateral fence barriers near wildlife crossing locations

Wildlife Crossings

Overpasses or underpasses with fencing, wildlife guards, and escape ramps

- Highly effective
  - Reduce WVC 80-90%
  - Safe passages for wildlife
- Examples of successful crossing structures mitigation:
  - US 191, Pinedale
  - US 30, Nugget Canyon
  - Hwy 789, north of Baggs





Preconstruction:

- 60% of crashes were due to WVC
- Average 63 WVC carcasses counted each year

Each ● represents a WVC carcass

Overpasses and Underpasses

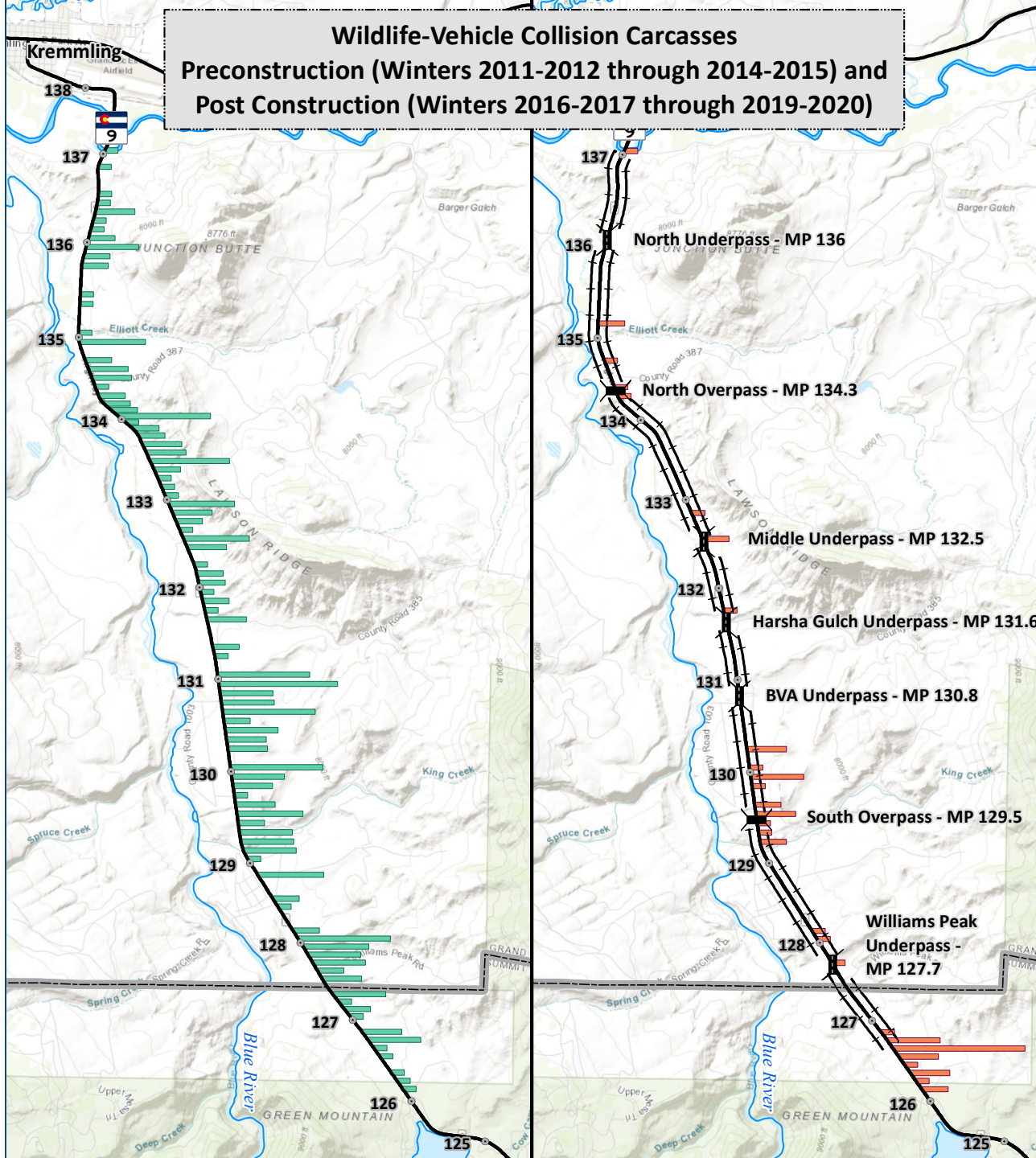
2 Overpasses
100’ wide x 66’ long

5 Underpasses
42’ wide x 14’ high x 66’ long

>90% reduction in WVC

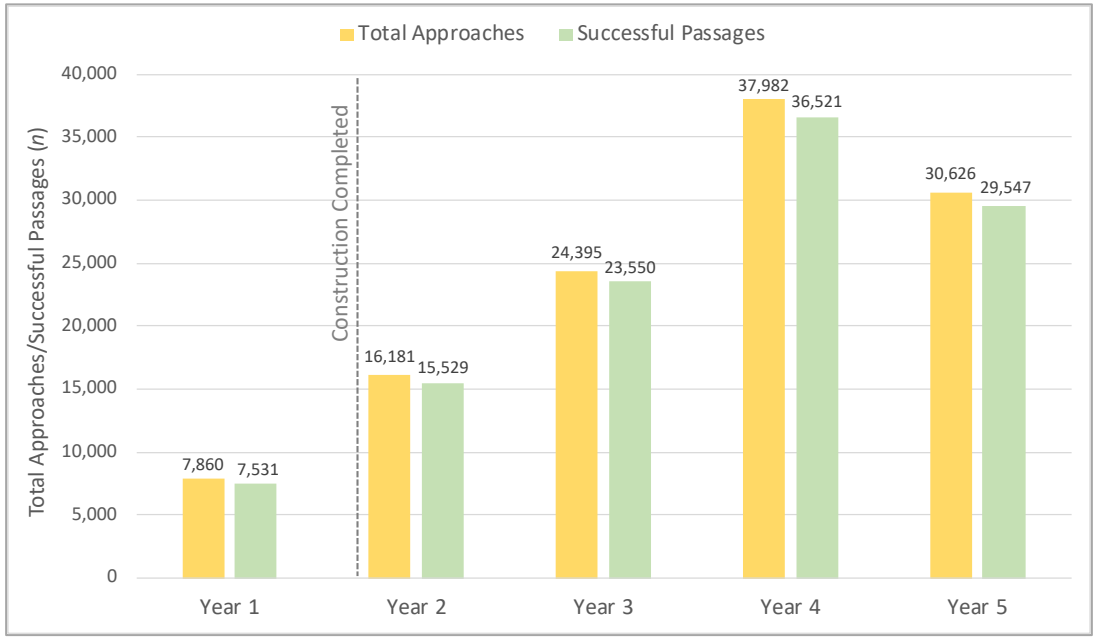
- Post construction WVC
  - Continued to occur around the south fence end
  - Greatest between MP 129.2-130.2

- The mitigation has helped to prevent 13 WVC crashes and 56 wildlife mortalities due to WVC each year

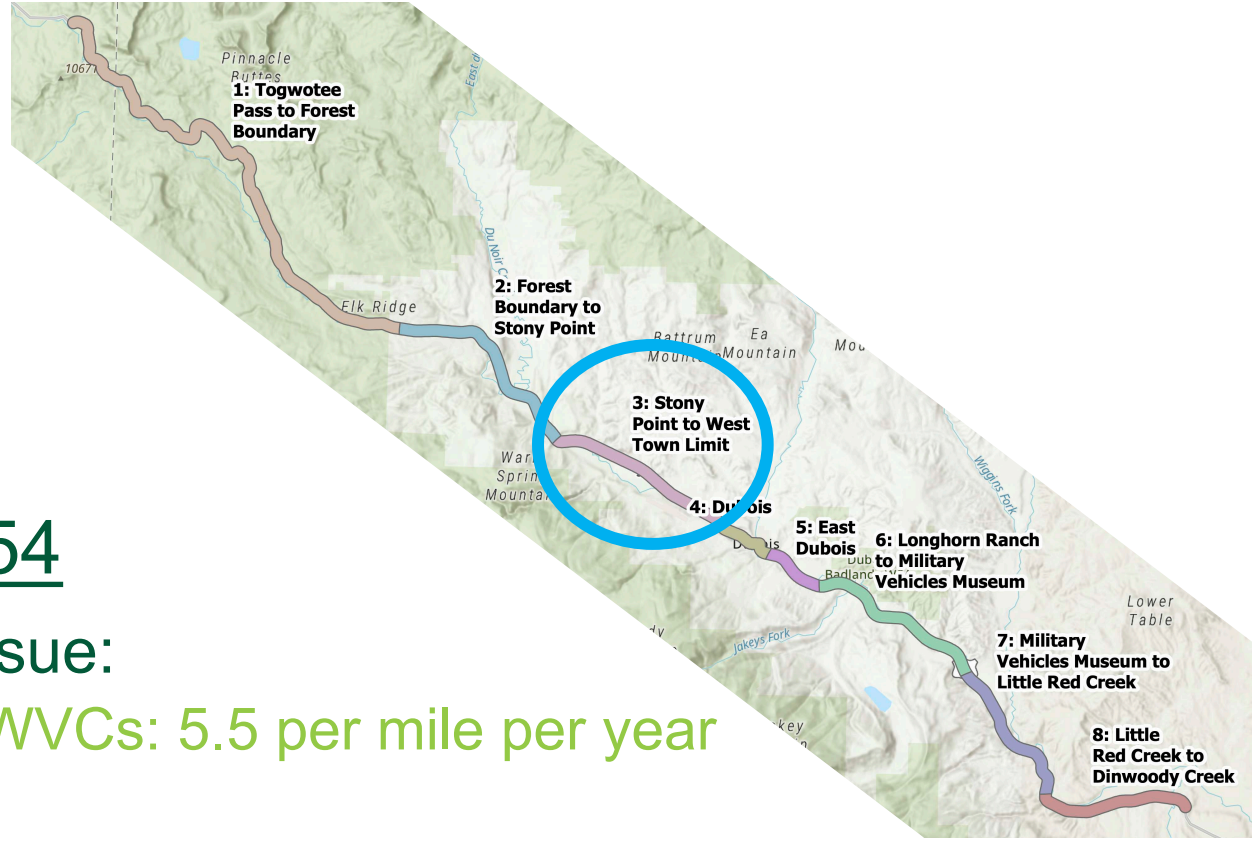


Mule Deer Use of the Crossing Structures

- Total of 112,678 mule deer successful passages (at all 7 structures)
- Use by both genders and all age groups
- 96% success rate across all structures
  - Range = 83-99%

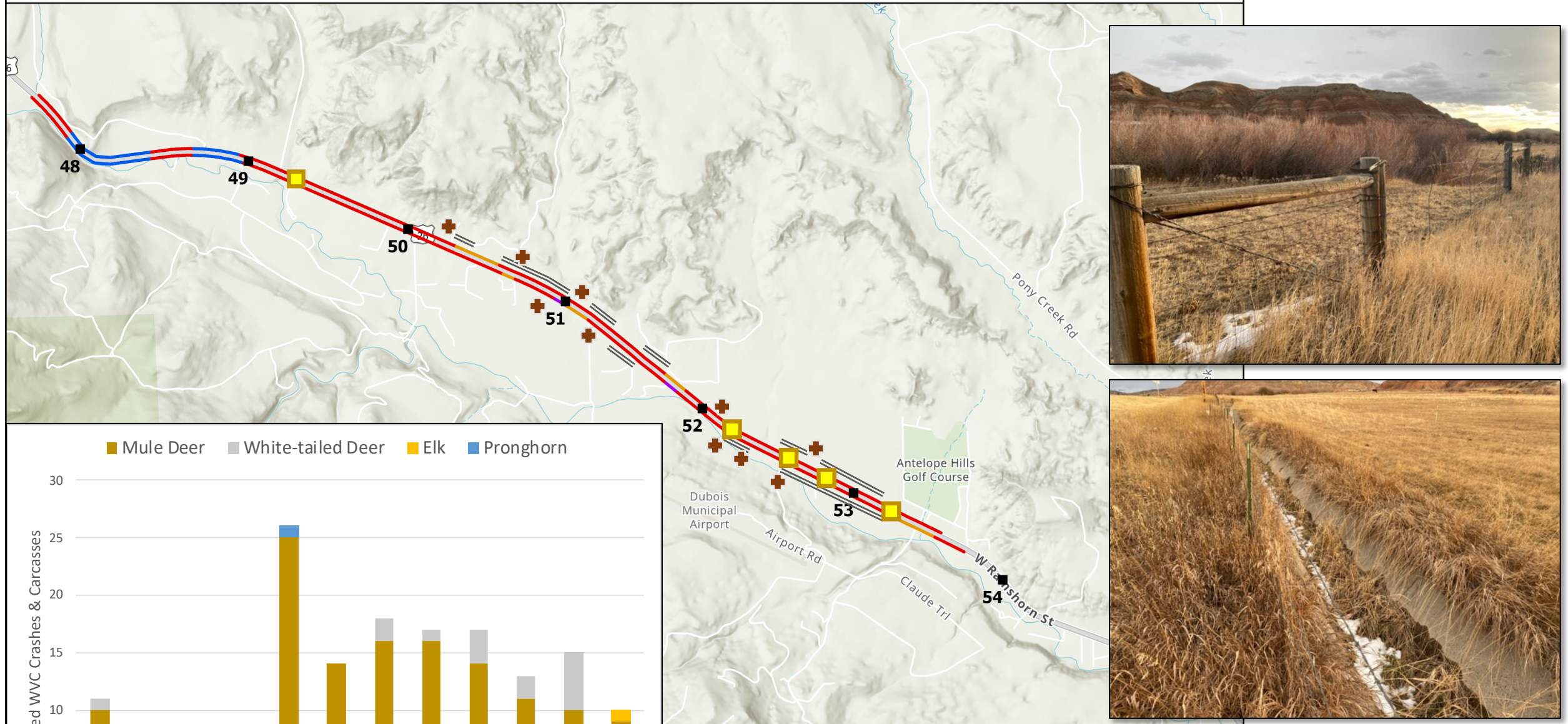


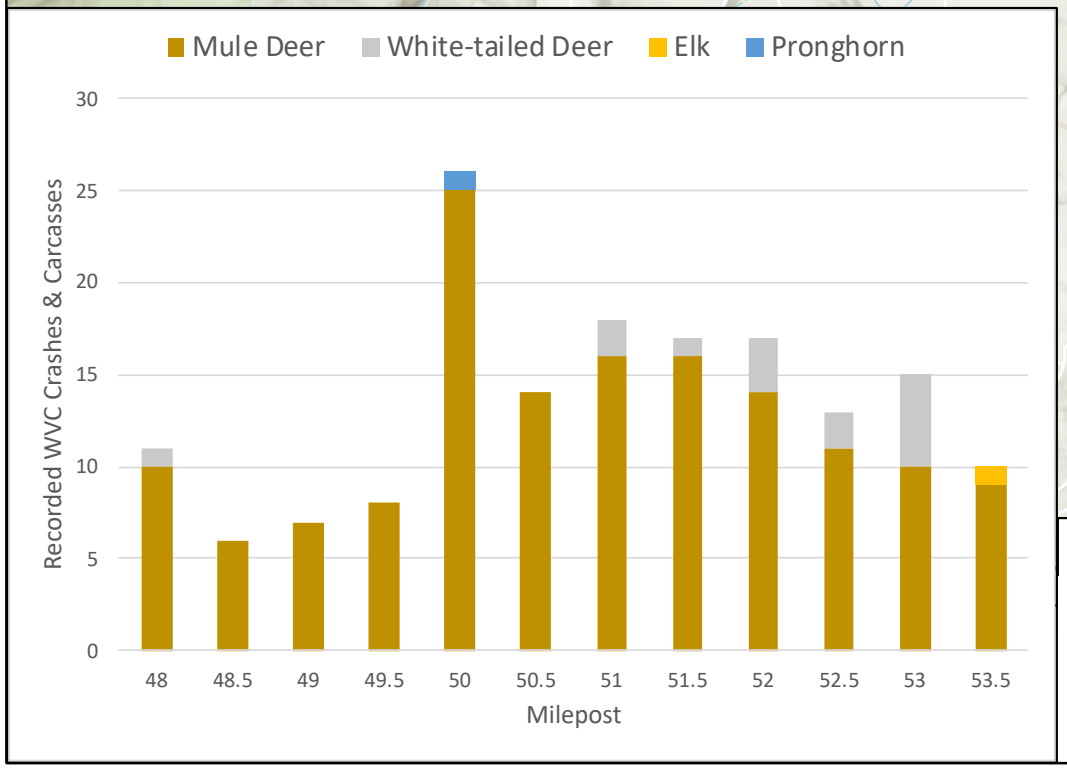
High Priority Segment 3: Stony Point to West Town Limits



MP 48 - 54

- Safety Issue:
  - High WVCs: 5.5 per mile per year
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer winter range and migration
  - Right-of-way fencing impedes wildlife movements across the highway





Irrigation Ditch
Vegetation Obstructions
Small Culverts

Fence Types

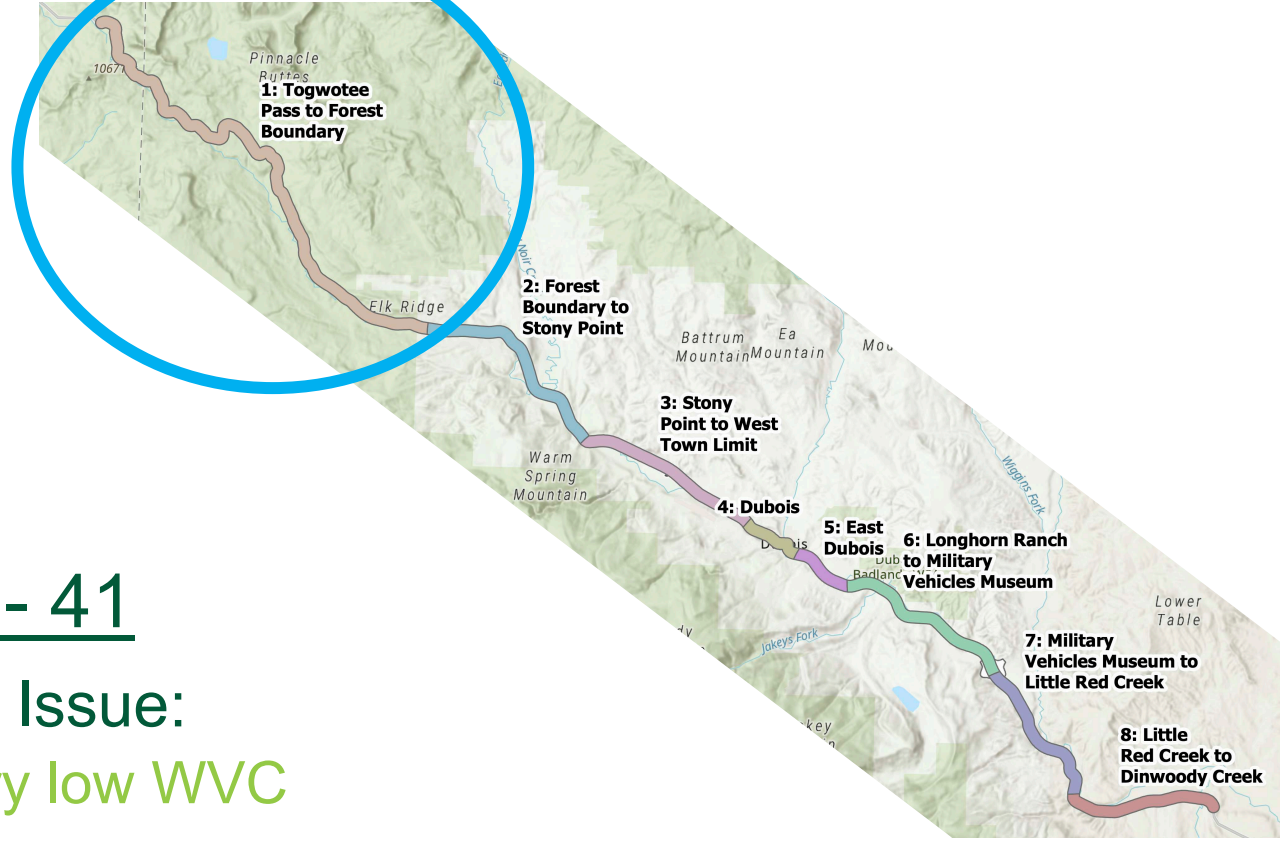
Wildlife Permeable
Semi-Permeable
Other Barrier
Woven Wire/Barrier Fence
Mile Markers

High Priority

Segment 3: Mitigation Recommendations

- Identify best opportunities for replacing fences with wildlife permeable fence
- Coordinate with NRCS to address irrigation ditch
  - Remove inactive sections
  - Replace with pipe in berm
- Identify and map locations for targeted vegetation clearing
- Optimize existing stock passes to permit wildlife passage
- Consider dual speed limit signs October through May

Segment 1: Togwotee Pass to Forest Boundary



MP 24 - 41

- Safety Issue:
  - Very low WVC
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Summer range habitat and migration

Segment 1: Mitigation Recommendations

- WYDOT: ongoing vegetation clearing in right-of-way
- Maintain existing permeability

Segment 2: Forest Boundary to Stony Point

MP 41 – 48

- Safety Issue:
  - Low WVCs: 1.3 per mile per year
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer migration

Segment 2: Mitigation Recommendations

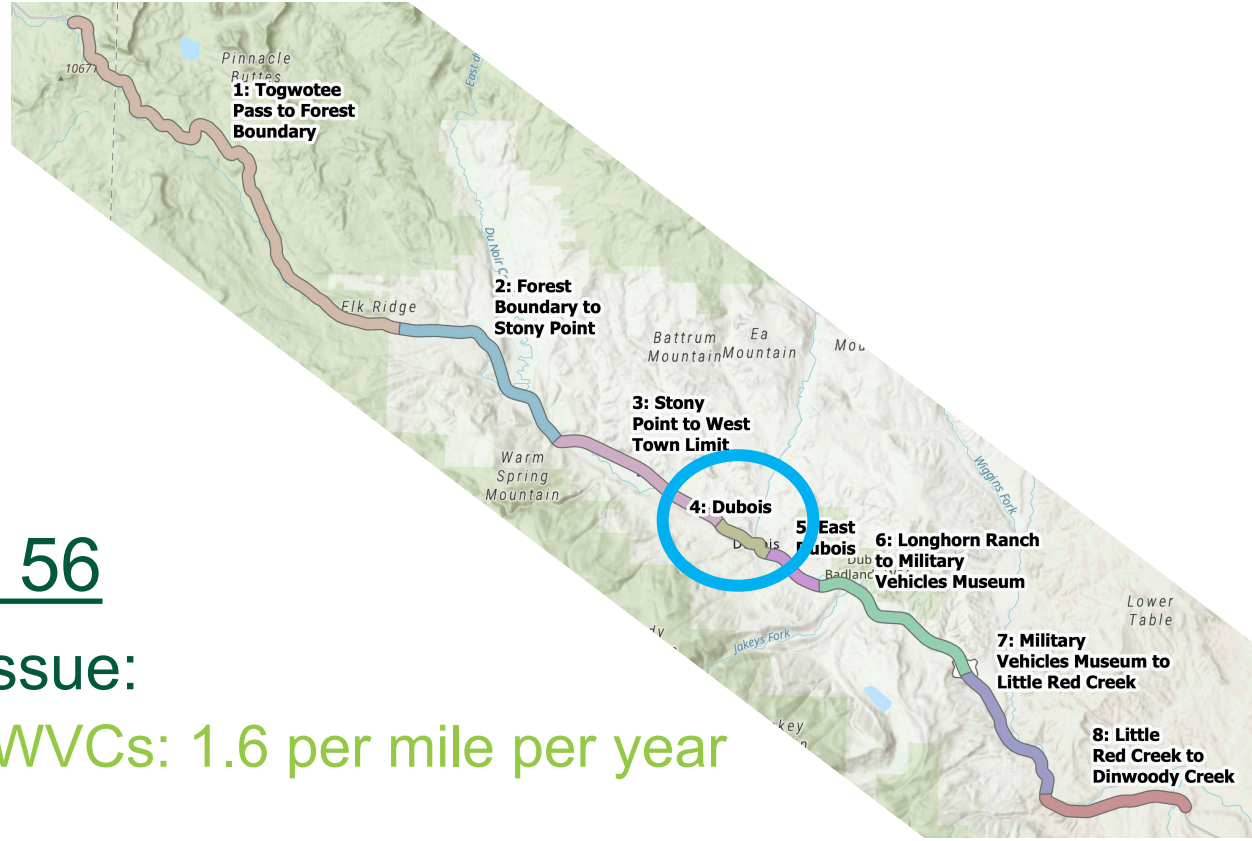
Medium Priority:

- Improve wildlife pathways and create fence gaps at existing bridges and culverts
- Coordinate with landowners to replace ROW fencing with wildlife permeable alternatives

Long-Term:

- Install short sections of guide fencing at existing bridges and culverts

Segment 4: Dubois



MP 54 – 56

- Safety Issue:
  - Low WVCs: 1.6 per mile per year
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer winter range
  - Urban area with 30mph speed limit

Segment 4: Mitigation Recommendations

- Improve roadway lighting
- Coordinate with the town to continue discouraging feeding of deer.

Segment 5: East Dubois

MP 56 – 58

- Safety Issue:
  - Very high WVCs: 9.3 per mile per year
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Heart of winter range for the Dubois herd
  - Daily movements across US 26
  - In 2020, much of the right-of-way fence replaced with wildlife-permeable fence

Segment 5: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:

- Optimize existing bridge and stock passes to promote wildlife passage

If Feasible:

- Install wildlife fencing to connect between existing bridges and small culverts

Segment 7: Military Vehicles Museum to Little Red Creek

MP 64 - 69

- Safety Issue:
  - High WVCs: 5.5 per mile per year
- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer winter range and migration
  - Bighorn sheep activity
  - Irrigated fields and river attract wildlife

Segment 7: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:

- Improve pathways and create fence gaps for wildlife at existing bridge
- Identify opportunities for forage improvements to help reduce wildlife movements across US 26

Long-Term:

- Consider adding a short section of guide fencing at existing bridge
- Consider segment for wildlife detection and driver warning system

Segment 8: Little Red Creek to Dinwoody Creek

MP 69 – 74

- Safety Issue:
  - High WVCs: 4.9 per mile per year

- Wildlife Considerations:
  - Mule deer winter range and migration
  - Bighorn sheep activity around Little Red Creek
  - Wind River corridor attracts wildlife

Segment 8: Mitigation Recommendations

Medium Priority:

- Replace ROW fencing with wildlife permeable fence
- Improve pathways and create fence gaps for wildlife at existing bridges and culverts

Long Term:

- Coordinate with tribes to improve natural water sources on the south side of US 26
- Consider adding a short sections of guide fencing at existing bridges and culverts

Next Steps

- Finalize Mitigation Strategy
  - Incorporate public feedback
- Develop cost estimates
  - Project may be phased to accommodate funding availability
- Fundraising and outreach
  - Create outreach tools
  - State and federal grants, private funding sources

The Road to a Safer US 26

Completed Mitigation Strategy (Summer 2021)

Obtain Funding for Design and Environmental Review

Environmental Review and Design

Obtain Funding for Construction

Construction

US 26 Partnership

Ask Questions and Share your comments on the US 26 Draft Mitigation Strategy

Use the Chat Box

You may also submit feedback following the meeting:

- Online Feedback Form: **wgfd.wyo.gov/DuboisRoads**
- Comments due: Friday, May 7